



# Universal Design for Learning:

## *A Viable Framework to Support Student-Led IEP Meetings*

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*Ms. Lowe is a secondary special education teacher who facilitates the transition planning process for a variety of students with disabilities. Her students have different strengths, support needs, and plans for their lives after high school. Ms. Lowe feels that she complies with the minimum transition planning requirements of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004). However, she knows her students are capable of taking a more active role in transition planning and particularly during their annual individualized education program (IEP) meetings. Ms. Lowe utilizes the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework in her classroom teaching and would like to use the UDL guidelines to enhance student participation before, during, and after IEP meetings. Kyra is a senior in Ms. Lowe's class who is receiving special education services due to a specific learning disability. Kyra has a strong interest in cooking and desires to be a chef. She plans to attend a culinary arts program at a local community college after graduation. Kyra is working with Ms. Lowe to prepare for her upcoming IEP meeting.*

## Self-Determination and UDL

Transition-age youth with disabilities have many of the same desires and plans for their lives after high school as their peers without disabilities. These plans often relate to the three postsecondary outcome areas recognized by the IDEA (2004): education/training, integrated employment, and independent living. A formal transition plan must be incorporated into the IEP no later than the IEP cycle in which the student turns 16, or younger if the IEP team decides appropriate to do so (IDEA, 2004; 34 CFR 300.320.[b] and [c]). In addition, the student must be invited to the IEP meeting if one of the purposes is to discuss postsecondary goals and transition services (34 CFR 300.321[b]). However, simply inviting a student to attend the IEP meeting does not equate active participation. When students are not provided support and instruction to actively participate in their IEP meetings, they typically do not understand the purpose of the meeting or know what to say (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). When this happens, teachers and other professionals can inadvertently dominate the IEP meeting rather than students taking a leadership role.

Promoting student participation in the IEP process, including making decisions about one's own future, is considered best practice in the field of transition (Eisenman et al., 2015; Papay & Bambara, 2014; Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Many curriculums and free online resources exist to teach students how to actively participate in their IEP meetings (see **Table 1**). In addition, research indicates students are capable of leading their IEP meetings when taught to do so. For example, Martin, Van Dycke, Christensen, et al. (2006) examined effects of the Self-Directed IEP curriculum, which teaches students to actively participate in their IEP meeting using 10 simple leadership steps. **Table 2** illustrates the 10 leadership steps and sample conversational phases aligned to each step. Martin, Van Dycke, Christensen, et al. observed 130 IEP meetings and collected data on who talked during the meeting (e.g., student, parent/guardian, special education teacher, general education teacher, administrator, counselor). Students who received the Self-Directed IEP curriculum spoke twice as much during the IEP meeting and completed more leadership steps compared to students who did not receive the curriculum. Conversely, special education teachers talked approximately 50% of the time during traditional teacher-led IEP meetings (Martin, Van Dycke, Christensen, et al., 2006). These findings and other studies (e.g., Martin, Van Dycke, Greene, et al., 2006; Royer, 2017) suggest students with disabilities are capable of taking an active role in their IEP meetings if given the opportunity to do so.

Development of self-determination skills is one of the most important benefits of increasing student participation during IEP meetings. Self-determined students act as "causal agents" in their lives (Shogren, Wohmeyer, Palmer, Forber-Pratt, et al., 2015). Being a causal agent means the student identifies goals in their life and then takes action to make those goals happen. Higher levels of self-determination have been linked to a variety of positive postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, including increased employment and community access (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little, 2015). One way to develop self-determination skills in students is by providing opportunities to

increase leadership in the IEP planning process, and the UDL framework can enhance this process.

UDL was conceptualized in the late 1990s from professionals at the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). The Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008) defined UDL as a:

scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that (a) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (b) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.

The UDL framework can be applied to a variety of instructional contexts and activities, and IEP meetings are one such context. The primary principle of the framework is to provide teachers with guidelines for designing and implementing instruction that can be adapted to meet the needs of diverse learners (CAST, 2018). These guidelines are based on the philosophy that teachers should provide multiple means of representation (Principle 1), multiple means of action and expression (Principle 2), and multiple means of engagement (Principle 3). There are nine specific guidelines and 31 checkpoints organized around these three principles.

The UDL framework is not a checklist, nor does it require teachers to use all 31 checkpoints at all times. Rather, the framework provides guidance in choosing multiple ways of providing information, interacting with and showing an understanding of that information, and engaging in a meaningful way with the information. A teacher can then embed these strategies in their practices to use with all students. This article provides concrete examples of how a teacher could meet each guideline. Teachers can reflect on their entry point to the framework based on student needs. The UDL guidelines, additional resources, and downloads may be found at [udlguidelines.cast.org](http://udlguidelines.cast.org).

**Table 1 Online Resources and Curriculums to Increase Student Participation in Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meetings**

<i>Resource or curriculum</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>How can I get it?</i>
IRIS Center (2018) module, <i>Secondary Transition: Student-Centered Transition Planning</i>	Self-guided and self-paced online module that identifies ways to involve students in the IEP process and take leadership roles at IEP meetings	Available for free at: <a href="https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/tran-scp/">https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/tran-scp/</a>
<i>Whose Future Is It Anyway? A Student Directed Transition Planning Process</i> (2nd ed. curriculum; Wehmeyer et al., 2004)	Curriculum that teaches self-determination skills and increased student participation in IEP meetings through 36 lessons across six sections	Available for free at: <a href="https://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/whos-future-is-it-anyway">https://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/whos-future-is-it-anyway</a>
National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C; 2021) <i>Self-Determination Presenter Guide</i>	NTACT:C guide that describes ways to teach self-determination skills to students with disabilities; includes a PowerPoint presentation with a script, pre/posttests for students, and workshop evaluation	Available for free at: <a href="https://transitionta.org/self-determination-presenter-guide/">https://transitionta.org/self-determination-presenter-guide/</a>
Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment <i>ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Transition Curriculum</i> materials (Martin et al., 2008)	Curriculum that teaches self-determination skills consisting of three strands: (a) choosing goals, (b) expressing goals during the IEP meeting, and (c) taking action to obtain goals	Available for free at: <a href="https://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/choicemaker-curriculum/choicemaker-self-determination-materials">https://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/choicemaker-curriculum/choicemaker-self-determination-materials</a>
Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment <i>Student-Directed Transition Planning</i> lessons	Eight lessons that teach students how to actively participate in their transition IEP meetings; materials include PowerPoints, teacher guides, step-by-step instructional strategies, and student scripts	Available for free at: <a href="https://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/student-directed-transition-planning">https://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/student-directed-transition-planning</a>

The UDL guidelines have influenced policy, technology, research, and education by reducing barriers and optimizing learning for all students (Capp, 2017; Meyer et al., 2014). The guidelines can be used by anyone who wants to implement the UDL framework in any type of learning environment (CAST, 2018). Barriers occur when there is a mismatch between the learner and their environment. Students with disabilities are likely to experience a variety of barriers in different environments. IEP meetings can be prone to barriers that create misunderstandings and frustration for students and their families. For example, some parents report IEP meetings are depersonalized and focused on compliance rather than true collaboration (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014).

Importantly, culturally and linguistically diverse parents and/or those with limited English proficiency are particularly vulnerable to barriers during IEP meetings. Potential barriers include a lack of written materials provided in the native language of the family, the overall IEP process not clearly defined, and parents' level of comfort advocating for their child if there is a disagreement with school professionals (Jung, 2011; Love et al., 2017). Although collaborating with culturally and linguistically families is a complex issue, barriers can be reduced when the student is the focus of the IEP meeting, and principles of UDL can be used to achieve this.

Specifically, Universal Design for Transition (Thoma et al., 2009) builds on the existing UDL framework to promote

successful postsecondary outcomes for all students. Both the UDL and Universal Design for Transition frameworks include the following principles: (a) multiple means of representation, (b) multiple means of engagement, and (c) multiple means of action and expression. The Universal Design for Transition framework includes the additional components of (d) multiple transition domains, (e) multiple means of transition assessments, (f) multiple means to support student self-determination, and (g) multiple sources of information (Thoma et al., 2017). The purpose of this article is to describe how the UDL framework can be applied to increase student participation in the transition planning process with a focus on student-led IEP meetings. Teaching students to actively

**Table 2 Individualized Education Program (IEP) Leadership Steps and Sample Conversational Phrases**

<i>Check if met</i>	<i>Leadership steps students can implement during IEP meetings</i>	<i>Sample conversational phrase aligned to each step</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Introduce team members	"Mom, this is my science teacher, Mr. Williams."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	State purpose of meeting	"The purpose of today's meeting is to help me prepare for life after high school."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Review past goals and progress	"This past year I met my goal of obtaining a part-time job for a minimum of 10 hours per week."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Ask for feedback	"Ms. Brown, what are some things I could do to improve in your class?"
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Ask questions if they aren't understood	"I don't understand what you're suggesting. Can you please rephrase it?"
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Deal with differences of opinion	"Thank you for sharing your opinion... I respectfully disagree."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	State needed support	"I need help taking notes in my science class because the teacher goes very quickly."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Express interest	"I have an interest in earning a degree in art."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Express skills and limits	"I'm good at working with numbers and need more help with my writing skills."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Close meeting by thanking everyone	"Thank you for coming! I appreciate your time."

Source: Martin, Van Dycke, Christensen, et al. (2006).

participate in their IEP meetings relates to the Universal Design for Transition component of multiple means to support student self-determination. Furthermore, developing self-determination skills of youth with disabilities is an important component of the transition to adulthood. We describe each principle of the UDL framework and how their corresponding guidelines and checkpoints can be used to enhance student participation in the transition planning process. We provide specific examples before, during, and after the IEP meeting.

### **Principle 1: Provide Multiple Means of Representation, the "What" of Learning**

Providing multiple means of representation supports students in getting information in multiple ways (see **Table 3**). All students learn differently at different times and in different situations. This learner variability explains why students comprehend information in different ways based on their individual learning needs. For example, students

with autism spectrum disorder, blindness, deafness, emotional behavior disorders, or learning disabilities will access IEP meeting content in different ways depending on their strengths, needs, and preferences. Special education teachers can provide different means of representation during the IEP meeting to enhance student and family engagement with the IEP content.

#### **Guideline 1: Provide Options for Perception**

Providing multiple options for perception means allowing the student to interact with the IEP content using different senses. IEP meeting information can be customized and displayed in a flexible format (Checkpoint 1.1). For example, many teachers and students use presentation platforms (e.g., Google Slides, PowerPoint, Prezi) during IEP meetings. Salient information can be displayed in larger font and in a different color to contrast with other information. Teachers may consider offering alternatives for auditory and visual

information (Checkpoints 1.2 and 1.3) during the IEP meeting. This is particularly important for students with auditory processing or visual needs. For example, a written transcript can be provided for a student with a hearing impairment to fully engage with a brief video played during the IEP meeting. Likewise, a student with a visual impairment may benefit from auditory cues to fully engage with the IEP meeting presentation using Google Slides.

#### **Guideline 2: Provide Options for Language and Symbols**

Barriers may unintentionally arise when information is presented to students in a single form of representation. Providing different options for language and symbols, such as through the use of visuals, can reduce some of those barriers. Teachers can use visuals to illustrate hard to comprehend topics during the IEP meeting (e.g., service hours as a clock). Vocabulary, symbols, syntax, and structure should also be clarified and defined (Checkpoints 2.1 and 2.2).

Table 3 Provide Multiple Means of Representation

Provide multiple means of representation: The “what” of learning	
UDL checkpoint	Suggested incorporation of UDL checkpoint into IEP meetings for student participation
<i>Provide options for <b>perception</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 1.1</i> Offer ways of customizing the display of information	Display IEP content in a variety of formats for all team members (e.g., PowerPoint slides, Prezi).
<i>Checkpoint 1.2</i> Offer alternatives for auditory information	Share key points from the IEP meeting, including goals, in alternative format only than auditorily, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visual diagrams</li> <li>- Symbols</li> <li>- Charts</li> </ul>
<i>Checkpoint 1.3</i> Offer alternatives for visual information	Use physical objects or auditory cues as an alternative to visual information.
<i>Provide options for <b>language and symbols</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 2.1</i> Clarify vocabulary and symbols	Put IEP-specific language (e.g., Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance) into “student-friendly” language (e.g., “How am I doing this semester?”).
<i>Checkpoint 2.2</i> Clarify syntax and structure	Clarify idioms, culturally specific phrases, and IEP-meeting jargon.
<i>Checkpoint 2.3</i> Support decoding of text, mathematical notation, and symbols	Provide a list of key terms that may be used during the meeting.
<i>Checkpoint 2.4</i> Promote understanding across languages	For families whose first language is not English, provide a translator during the meeting and paperwork in the family’s language.
<i>Checkpoint 2.5</i> Illustrate through multiple media	Students can pick examples of work or projects completed during the school year to share at the meeting.
<i>Provide options for <b>comprehension</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 3.1</i> Activate or supply background knowledge	Link information students have previously learned to relevant content in the IEP or previous experiences with the IEP process.
<i>Checkpoint 3.2</i> Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships	Use examples and nonexamples and graphic organizers to emphasize main ideas in the IEP (e.g., transition goals).
<i>Checkpoint 3.3</i> Guide information processing and visualization	Chunk information into smaller steps and present in a sequential process.
<i>Checkpoint 3.4</i> Maximize transfer and generalization	Provide supported opportunities to generalize transition planning goals and experiences to postsecondary life.

Source: *Universal Design for Learning* (2018).

Note: UDL = Universal Design for Learning; IEP = individualized education program.

IEP-specific language may be unfamiliar to students and their families and should be translated or clarified. For example, the required “Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance” section of the IEP can be

stated in student-friendly language as “How am I doing this semester?” and family-friendly language as “How is my child doing academically?” Teachers can also consider supporting decoding of text (Checkpoint 2.3) by providing a list of

IEP-specific terms that may be used during the meeting (e.g., accommodations, related services, least restrictive environment, due process, individualized instruction). Teachers should promote understanding across languages

(Checkpoint 2.4) and particularly for families whose first language is not English. The IDEA (2004) requires language interpretation services for parents to understand the proceedings of the IEP meeting and to participate meaningfully in their child's education planning (20 USC Sec. 1400[c][4][B]). If a translator is being used at the meeting, teachers should prepare the translator by providing example language that may be used during the meeting in advance. Finally, teachers can allow students to illustrate their progress through multiple media (Checkpoint 2.5). Use of images and interactive graphics such as those available on digital presentation platforms may be particularly advantageous. For example, a student can create a simple graphic using templates provided by Prezi to demonstrate their progress on annual transition goals.

### **Guideline 3: Provide Options for Comprehension**

Students and families must be able to understand the IEP document and transition plan for these materials to be meaningful in the student's life. Background knowledge must be activated or supplied (Checkpoint 3.1) to support understanding of the IEP content. Teachers can use advanced organizers (e.g., concept maps, K-W-L chart) to preteach IEP content that will be discussed during the meeting. For example, a student may describe their independent living goal by using a T-chart to describe where they want and do not want to live after high school graduation. There is a lot of information to cover during the IEP meeting. Therefore, teachers should highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships of the IEP content (Checkpoint 3.2) For instance, the teacher may point out some new skills the student has learned since the previous year's IEP meeting. The teacher and student may then create a concept map as a graphic representation of how the new skills relate to the student's goal(s). Additionally, teachers could highlight the big ideas in the IEP in different colors to code the document for the student and family (e.g., "Here is where I want to be.... This is my path to get there.... This is how I know when I have arrived....").

Teachers should guide information processing and visualization (Checkpoint

3.3) during the meeting. This can be achieved by "chunking" information into smaller steps and in a sequential process. For example, students can summarize what was discussed after each component of the IEP meeting (e.g., "We just talked about my accommodations, and I require guided notes to do my best work."). Finally, maximize transfer and generalization (Checkpoint 3.4) of transition goals by discussing how the skills learned during high school will transfer to postsecondary life.

*Kyra attended her IEP meetings during earlier high school years but primarily answered questions when asked and did not take a leadership role. For her senior year, Kyra expressed an interest in leading the IEP meeting with support from Ms. Lowe and other team members. She decided to make Google slides to guide the key sections of the meeting. Kyra previously enjoyed using Google slides in her English class because of their visual nature and option for captions. Ms. Lowe developed a template for Kyra to follow while working on her Google slides. Kyra showed her presentation to Ms. Lowe a few days before her scheduled IEP meeting, and Ms. Lowe gave her specific feedback and suggestions for improvement. Together, they decided Kyra will introduce each section of the IEP and then open the discussion for other team members to contribute. They also discussed a specific plan for Kyra to ask for a short break during the meeting if she became overwhelmed. Ms. Lowe e-mailed the meeting expectations to all team members in advance, and Kyra distributed invitations she made. Kyra also made a list of people in her life who could help her achieve her postsecondary goal of attending the culinary program. She planned to share the list of people at the IEP meeting because many of the people would be in attendance. Kyra was nervous and excited for her meeting later this week.*

### **Principle 2: Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression, the "How" of Learning**

Providing multiple means of action and expression allows for students to engage with information in different ways (see **Table 4**). Students navigate learning environments in different ways to express what they know (CAST, 2018). Therefore, allowing only one avenue for all students to show their learning or understanding

of information limits the opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. On the other hand, providing different means of action and expression are essential to address student variability.

### **Guideline 4: Provide Options for Physical Action**

Student engagement during the IEP meeting is likely to be increased by physical action. For example, giving the student a pointer or slide advancer/clicker is a simple way for the student to physically advance each slide. Similarly, students should be provided with different methods of responding to and navigating the IEP content (Checkpoint 4.1). For example, students can physically move manipulatives to indicate their preferences on a traditional preference assessment. For an employment preference assessment, the manipulatives could be cards with images or actual objects representing different types of jobs. In addition, teachers should optimize access to tools and assistive technologies during the IEP meeting (Checkpoint 4.2). Examples of such assistance technology include alternative keyboards, customized overlays, and specific software.

### **Guideline 5: Provide Options for Expression and Communication**

Students will have different preferences for expressing themselves and communicating with others. Teachers should provide multiple ways for students to express themselves and communicate during the IEP meeting. For example, teachers can provide multiple media for students to communicate (Checkpoint 5.1), such as the use of drawings, comics, or storyboards. Students with communication support needs may use augmentative and alternative communication devices during the meeting. Devices can be programmed in advance to align with the meeting agenda. In addition, students can use multiple tools for construction and composition (Checkpoint 5.2), such as spellcheckers, text-to-speech software, sentence starters, and concept mapping. Sentence starters can be particularly helpful to support students as they articulate their future plans (e.g., "In 1 year, I plan to... ; In 5 years, I plan to... ; In 10 years, I plan

Table 4 Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression

Provide multiple means of action and expression: The “how” of learning	
UDL checkpoint	Suggested incorporation of UDL checkpoint into IEP meetings for student participation
<i>Provide options for <b>physical action</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 4.1</i> Vary the methods for response and navigation	Display IEP required paperwork in a variety of formats for all team members.
<i>Checkpoint 4.2</i> Optimize access to tools and assistive technologies	Utilize assistive technology as needed to optimize access to understanding the IEP content.
<i>Provide options for <b>expression and communication</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 5.1</i> Use multiple media for communication	Allow and encourage students and IEP team members to communicate using a variety of media (e.g., Google document, Jamboard).
<i>Checkpoint 5.2</i> Use multiple tools for construction and composition	Allow and encourage the student to demonstrate competencies by sharing sample projects and assignments.
<i>Checkpoint 5.3</i> Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance	Increase student participation in the IEP meeting gradually each year from first year until final year of high school.
<i>Provide options for <b>executive functions</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 6.1</i> Guide appropriate goal setting	Provide prompts and scaffolding to break down long-term postsecondary goals into smaller, manageable goals.
<i>Checkpoint 6.2</i> Support planning and strategy development	Provide checklists, templates, and prompts to help the student understand a problem or make a plan for the future.
<i>Checkpoint 6.3</i> Facilitate managing information and resources	Provide guides for note-taking during the IEP meeting.
<i>Checkpoint 6.4</i> Enhance capacity for monitoring progress	Students can monitor their progress meeting their own transition goals in the areas of employment, education/training, and independent living.

Source: Center for Applied Special Technology (2018).

Note: UDL = Universal Design for Learning; IEP = individualized education program.

to...”). A variety of different technologies are available for video presentations rather than only presenting in person. For instance, a student may feel more comfortable filming themselves introducing components of the IEP meeting or stating their postsecondary goals. The video could be played at the meeting rather than the student speaking at the meeting.

Finally, students can build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance (Checkpoint 5.3) from year to year. The first year of increasing student participation in the IEP

meeting may focus on students completing one or two leadership steps (e.g., introducing team members, reviewing past goals). Competencies are built on each year as a result of graduated levels of support. By the final years of high school, students may lead all or the majority of the meeting.

**Guideline 6: Provide Options for Executive Functions**

Executive functions include skills such as self-management, working memory, flexible thinking, and paying attention to

relevant information. Executive functioning skills are important to navigate everyday life. In addition, the transition planning process can be daunting, and utilizing executive functioning skills to plan for the future may be challenging for some students. One way teachers can support students to develop their executive functioning skills is by guiding appropriate goal setting (Checkpoint 6.1), particularly related to postsecondary goals. Long-term postsecondary goals, such as obtaining a job, can be scaffolded into manageable, smaller goals (e.g., update résumé, apply

for five jobs within the local community, attend a job fair). Teachers can support planning and strategy development (Checkpoint 6.2) for obtaining postsecondary goals by providing checklists or templates for overcoming a problem. For example, if a student is not invited to interview with any of the jobs they applied, then any of the following strategies could be implemented: (a) Call those jobs and follow up on the status of the position, (b) ask for an alternative interview format (e.g., job shadowing), or (c) apply to different jobs.

A significant amount of information and resources is necessary for students to meet their postsecondary goals and participate meaningfully in the IEP process. Some students may feel disorganized or unprepared for life after high school. Teachers can facilitate management of information and resources (Checkpoint 6.3) by providing templates for organizing information. For example, many colleges require an entrance essay. Accordingly, a template or example essay will likely be beneficial to students who must organize their ideas to write an entrance essay. Likewise, a teacher and student can work together to create lists that help the student meet their target goals (e.g., list of apartments to view to live independently, list of colleges to apply). Finally, teachers can enhance capacity for students to monitor their progress (Checkpoint 6.4) by developing a system for students to monitor their progress toward reaching postsecondary goals. For example, students can complete a brief reflection page each week or month to report on their progress toward meeting large postsecondary goals.

*During the IEP meeting, Ms. Lowe displayed Kyra's Google slides on the SmartBoard. She also printed a handout of Kyra's slides so team members may reference the hard copies if needed. Kyra introduced herself to start the meeting, then introduced the team members to her mom. Kyra's mom stated she was nervous about Kyra graduating from high school. Kyra stated the purpose of the meeting and provided an overview of her past goals and progress so far this school year, including a description of her current classes. Kyra stated she is struggling in her Western civilization class primarily because of the fast pace of the course. The Western civilization teacher was at the IEP meeting and offered to provide guided*

*notes for Kyra, which related to her eligible accommodation of note-taking assistance. Kyra stated she would appreciate the guided notes. Regarding her postsecondary goals, Kyra stated she will attend the culinary arts program at the local community college. The IEP team members brainstormed the short-term steps necessary to achieve this goal, including relevant due dates and timeline for the application process. Kyra registered for a tour of the community college with the support of the school counselor. Kyra shared her list of people in her life who can support her to meet her postsecondary goals related to attending the culinary arts program and living independently. Together, the team created a reasonable timeline and plan with specific action steps for Kyra to take with support from the people in her life.*

### **Principle 3: Provide Multiple Means of Engagement, the “Why” of Learning**

Providing multiple means of engagement supports students at the cognitive and social emotional levels (see *Table 5*). Students need to feel a personal connection to their learning to activate engagement. Additionally, due to the variability of individual learners, engagement does not manifest the same in all learners. For example, some students process information better when moving, whereas others process better being stationary. Students can be fully engaged cognitively and emotionally, but their engagement likely looks different based on their variability. Therefore, it is necessary to provide multiple means of engagement to support the diverse needs of each learner. Teachers use this principle to guide the design of an environment, instruction, and tasks that offer relevancy and appropriate challenge and supports and develop self-regulation skills to enhance learning.

#### **Guideline 7: Provide Options for Recruiting Interest**

Students are not able to engage with information if they do not attend to that information. During the transition planning process, some students may be naturally highly engaged, whereas others may feel overwhelmed and need more scaffolding. For those students who need more support, teachers can recruit interest

by incorporating their strengths and interests. For example, a student who loves makeup and styling hair may benefit from structured activities to develop an interest in cosmetology as a career path. Teachers can also recruit interest by optimizing the individual choice and autonomy of students (Checkpoint 7.1). When students are offered more choices, they enhance their self-determination skills and take charge of their own life. Teachers should provide a variety of choices throughout the IEP planning process. For example, both small choices (e.g., where the student would like to sit during the IEP meeting) and big choices (e.g., deciding which classes to take) are important.

Some students may not find the IEP meeting to be relevant if they do not see a clear linkage to their lives. Teachers can optimize relevance, value, and authenticity (Checkpoint 7.2) by providing culturally relevant transition activities. The student's age, preferences, personality, and culture must be taken into consideration when structuring the IEP meeting. For example, some students may feel comfortable speaking freely, whereas other students may need a conversation script or prepared notes. The transition goals should be personalized to the student's life and based on the student's interests and strengths. Finally, teachers should minimize threats and distractions during the IEP meeting (Checkpoint 7.3) by creating a safe space. IEP meetings should be as comfortable as possible for students and their families. Language and jargon used during the IEP meeting should be clearly defined. In addition, a clearly defined schedule and agenda will assist all team members to have a clear sense of purpose. The space where the meeting is held should be quiet, private, and free from distractions.

#### **Guideline 8: Provide Options for Sustaining Effort and Persistence**

Planning for life after high school is challenging for many students. Therefore, sustaining effort and persistence year after year is important. The salience of goals and objectives can be heightened (Checkpoint 8.1) by breaking down long-term goals into manageable short-term objectives and revisiting them on a regular



Table 5 Provide Multiple Means of Engagement

Provide multiple means of engagement” The “why” of learning	
UDL checkpoint	Suggested incorporation of UDL checkpoints into IEP meetings for student participation
<i>Provide options for <b>recruiting interest</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 7.1</i> Optimize individual choice and autonomy	Provide choices throughout the IEP meeting planning process.
<i>Checkpoint 7.2</i> Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity	Create transition goals in collaboration with the IEP team that are personalized to the student’s life and personal goals.
<i>Checkpoint 7.3</i> Minimize threats and distractions	Create a supportive environment for the IEP meeting.
<i>Provide options for <b>sustaining effort and persistence</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 8.1</i> Heighten salience of goals and objectives	Help student to organize transition goals into order of importance.
<i>Checkpoint 8.2</i> Vary demands and resources to optimize challenges	Gradually increase student participation during the IEP meeting from first to last year of high school.
<i>Checkpoint 8.3</i> Foster collaboration and community	Encourage assistance and mentorship from a variety of people in the student’s life (e.g., general education teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, community members).
<i>Checkpoint 8.4</i> Increase mastery-oriented feedback	After the meeting, provide specific feedback to the student about their participation.
<i>Provide options for <b>self-regulation</b></i>	
<i>Checkpoint 9.1</i> Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation	Provide a visual support (e.g., checklist) that reminds the student of available options if feeling overwhelmed during the meeting (e.g., take a break).
<i>Checkpoint 9.2</i> Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies	Provide modeling and scaffolding for managing emotions before, during, and after the IEP meeting.
<i>Checkpoint 9.3</i> Develop self-assessment and reflection	Student can complete a self-assessment after the meeting to reflect on what went well and potential areas of growth for future years.

Source: Center for Applied Special Technology (2018).

Note: UDL = Universal Design for Learning; IEP = individualized education program.

basis with the student. For example, a student with a long-term goal of attending college will have to meet multiple short-term goals (e.g., completing the college application, taking admissions exams). Teachers can encourage students when they meet their short-term goals, which will help them to keep working toward their long-term goals. Teachers can also vary demands and resources to optimize the challenges experienced by students (Checkpoint 8.2). As described previously, student participation can vary from the first year (e.g., attending the IEP meeting

for the first time, introducing team members) until the final year of high school (e.g., leading the meeting in full). Collaboration should be fostered (Checkpoint 8.3) by drawing on resources within the community and encouraging the student to seek assistance from family members, teachers, and other professionals (e.g., administrator, guidance counselor). For transition assessments, teachers can increase mastery-oriented feedback (Checkpoint 8.4) by providing constructive and relevant feedback. For example, after the

IEP meeting, the IEP case manager may consider providing specific feedback to the student about leadership skills they implemented well and potential areas of growth.

**Guideline 9: Provide Options for Self-Regulation**

Self-regulation involves students recognizing their own emotional states and coping appropriately, which may be necessary during an IEP meeting. Teachers can promote expectations and

beliefs that optimize motivation (Checkpoint 9.1) by supporting students to self-regulate their behavior. Despite the teacher's best efforts to create a safe space (Checkpoint 7.3), a student may feel overwhelmed in the moment. Having strategies in place to assist the student to cope during the meeting allows the student to regulate and move forward. For example, students can use a visual guide to remind them how to ask for a break if needed.

Teachers can facilitate personal coping skills and strategies (Checkpoint 9.2) by providing guidance for managing emotions during the meeting. For example, the student may get frustrated with a teacher or paraprofessional, and working through this frustration with the adult would be beneficial. Finally, teachers can support students to develop self-assessment and reflection (Checkpoint 9.3) skills during the transition planning process. Students can describe what is working well toward meeting their postsecondary goals and what components require additional support.

*After the IEP meeting, Kyra referred to her action steps to continue working to achieve her postsecondary goals. Kyra's family was pleased to see her interest in culinary arts was encouraged by the school staff. Overall, Ms. Lowe and the other IEP team members created a supportive environment for Kyra during the transition planning process. Kyra's strengths, preferences, and interests were incorporated into all transition activities. By applying the UDL framework, the quality of the IEP meeting was enhanced and more accessible for all team members. Barriers were reduced before, during, and after the meeting by allowing Kyra to take a leadership role in planning and participating in the meeting. Kyra's long-term goal of attending community college was broken into manageable short-term objectives with key people in Kyra's life providing assistance as needed. Kyra shared that she felt supported during the transition planning process and excited about her future.*

## Final Thoughts

Planning for the postschool outcomes of students with disabilities is a critical component of special education programming and services (IDEA, 2004; Mazzotti et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2011; Test et al., 2009). Applying the UDL framework to increase student

participation in IEP meetings is one way to support students to plan for their lives after high school. In addition, the UDL framework can reduce barriers and increase engagement of students and their families during the IEP planning process. When students take an active role in planning and leading their IEP meetings, this creates a valuable experience for students to increase their self-determination skills (Thoma et al., 2009). In short, the UDL framework is an important tool for teachers to support students in a variety of instructional contexts, including student-led IEP meetings.

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